(https://stanceondance.com/)

Stay on Top of Your Mountain

September 26, 2019

Editorial Note: For the past seven years, Stance on Dance has asked a variety of dance artists at different points in their careers what "making it" means to them. Please join us in looking at what "making it" means (https://stanceondance.com/category/viewpoints/perspectives/making-it/) *as a dancer, artist and human.*

BY MISA KELLY

Did I "make it?"

It depends on who you ask.

If one were to ask the institution where I received my MFA in 1996, given I am not listed as a notable alumnus, in their view my career hasn't been significant enough to be listed. This implies, from this singular institution's view, I haven't "made it."

I generalize and ask myself, do I want to "make it" in the way academics, critics and glossy dance magazines measure success? Is it even possible to go on and "make it" by their standards at the age of 60? Is this mentality even relevant for where humanity is in its evolutionary process and the present planetary challenges, planet that, in my view, is very much in crisis going through a soft apocalypse of sorts?

Given the nature of who I am as a multi-modal maker, where I have chosen to settle, and my philosophical and spiritual views about the role of the free-range maker, alchemist and innovator in society today, it is clearly evident that these qualities, interests and values may never result in me "making it" by contemporary society's professional standards.

The road less travelled has chosen me and I've said yes to the adventure with no regrets (other than taking out a student loan to fund my MFA – useless degree, but great experience.)

With regards to my journey, I am reminded of a special-needs sibling who is also an artist. When I ask her for council after coaching sessions as a Peer Support, Leilani often cheerfully advises, "Stay on top of your mountain."

From the vantage point here, on top of my own proverbial mountain, life is good, really good and, in many respects, I feel as if I am living in nirvana day-to-day. I am an entirely different human as a consequence of pursuing a career in the arts and, although I feel as if I am just now discovering who I really am, I am profoundly grateful for the depth of awareness that does exist in this moment and am in awe of the potential of what there is yet to discover.

(https://stanceondance.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Misa-Kelly-photo-by-Kathee-Miller.jpg)

Photo by Kathee Miller

At this phase of my development, I have achieved all the things I once perceived were necessary to be and do as a dance-maker and my approach to this medium has relaxed considerably. My initial intention was to ground into integrity, value the process as opposed to the product, make strong work, grow as an artist, and share my work with the world beyond the confines of the small town in which I reside, building bridges of opportunities for other artists to different cities and countries even. I chose a path marked by generosity and inclusivity which I attribute, in part, to the Aloha spirit that has been passed on to me by my Hawaiian ancestors, and perhaps the essence of my Yugoslavian immigrant grandfather who was a proponent of Ghandi, light therapy, health food and socialism.

With support from my spouse as well as my best friend Sarah Wingren, I invested $35 in a self-help book after completing my dance-making training. Together, we co-founded a non-profit called Future Traditions Foundation. This served as an umbrella for my own work as a dance-maker. For 15 years, I wore the bulk of the creative and administrative hats for SonneBlauma Danscz Theatre, a project umbrellaed by the Future Traditions Foundation. The non-profit also served as a resource for the community with a focus on services not being provided by other arts organizations. We grounded into producing studio showings, festivals, and community and educational outreach programming.

We grew this boutique company and toured California and New York before allowing it to organically morph into its current incarnation: ArtBark International. As ArtBark, we developed a distinctive process that enabled us to create work together despite its creative members living in different cities and countries. Our creative and organizational style shifted to reflect our community's sense of conscious leadership, collaboration and co-creation. We focused on sustainability, shifted the paradigm in how the arts organize, and celebrated and actualized cross-cultural exchange, community building, and making socially relevant work in a mindful manner.

It feels nothing short of miraculous to think that not only have I intensely focused on my work as a multi-modal innovator, but I've also juggled other jobs as well as harnessed the power of the arts as a mechanism to overcome the impact of my adverse childhood experiences which led to the development of complex-PTSD and associated conditions. I coined the lifestyle 'an extreme sport' and am completely baffled, in hindsight, by this insane commitment to the craft and the many performance offerings as a cultural medicine.

Initially, it was not an easy journey at all. The most agonizing, heart wrenching and awkward stretch was growing to realize that the dance companies and choreographers celebrated as having "made it" by academia, critics and national publications was flat out not me. Those paradigms, mindsets and intentions presented themselves as the antithesis of my perception of why I was here on the planet.

The wonder of my present existence, this nirvana, I hold as a treasure close to my heart and share the breadth and depth of who I am with fewer and fewer humans, which, in part, is a factor of the aging process itself. I increasingly embrace an analog world and spend less time in virtual social media orbits than when I was working full-time with copious events planned in a single season.

My primary current interest is to initiate from a practice of *being* rather than *doing,* and to allow activity and intention to emerge from this state of being.

Does it still include dance? Sort of.

More than a decade ago, realizing I had bought the religion of contemporary dance training hook, line and sinker, I came to the realization that I might have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. I followed the impulse to "de-dancify" my body, which resulted in manifesting a process that is unique to me as a mover and maker.

I'm happy to say I've found the baby thrown out with the bathwater, and oh my word, the body of understanding. It is so not about what my teachers and mentors taught me. I have set the intention to write about these discoveries as a companion piece to my book *I Graduated with a Dance Degree, Now What? (https://www.amazon.com/Graduated-Dance-Degree-Now-What/dp/1548007838)*

A few months ago, I felt drawn back to the traditional space where dance and dance-makers often congregate, a community ballet class, which was really surprising to me, and I found myself there for entirely different reasons than previously. I was there for the sheer joy of connecting with community and, for as long as this brings me joy, I will continue to pop in and add happiness to the space.

Towards re-defining "making it," I ask you, the reader: Are you being true to you? Are you harnessing the integrity of your personal sense of what you came to the planet to be and do? Have you set the intention to explore this for the duration that this grows your soul? Are you willing to let go and move on with gratitude and respect when this stops growing your soul and allow something else to emerge from your research? If so, then congratulations; you have become your mountain! In my assessment, you haven't so much "made it," you *are it.*

What's left?

Only the tango with my maker's mystery knows but, in this moment, I can feel the wind under my wings. I stretch them out, and I settle into the infinite expanse of an inner blue sky and ride the awareness of watching my breath with tremendous gratitude for every soul who has supported my journey.

I am aware that entertaining thoughts of "making it" implies an arrival of sorts. One never truly arrives if one embraces that life is an adventure and, as long as there is breath in the body and awareness, one holds the capacity to grow.

Given this, circling back to an opening question, do I want to "make i*t?"* I respond, no; I want to continue to adventure, grow and discover. This is the way of the road less travelled that has chosen me. Breathing from a place of knowing, no matter how much I discover, there will always be more and, for as long as dance-making serves this growth journey, I will

most likely continue to engage.

Anything in the works?

Yes, I am actively engaged in a one-month creative residency in NYC with my international tribe.

Mahalo for reading!

Disclaimer: This is a singular perspective. Digest what resonates; up-cycle, de-cycle, re-cycle what doesn't.

(https://stanceondance.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Misa-Kelly-photo-by-Stephen-Kelly.jpg)

Photo by Stephen Kelly

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Misa Kelly *is a multi-modal free-range maker who has engaged in more than 200 happenings in relation to the arts. It has been a wild ride and, without the support of her beloved, Stephen Kelly, his family, and the Rudi Schulte Family Foundation, her wildest creative dreams would never have manifested. She looks forwards to travelling to Ireland to celebrate her 60th birthday this summer, being in the same space with ArtBark collaborators this fall, and continuing to be a voice and advocate for survivors of extreme abuse as a part of the sub #metoo movement. Presently, her primary focus is to initiate from a state of being rather than doing and to welcome activities that make her heart happy, such as singing to mother nature in the wilderness, sculpting, painting, drawing, moving, writing, enjoying the company of family and friends, hosting celebrations, and befriending the backyard birds, lizards, bunnies, squirrels and chipmunks.*

Follow her on Instagram @freerangemaker or visit www.artbark.org (http://www.artbark.org/), www.sonneblauma.com (http://www.sonneblauma.com/) or artbarkinternation.wixsite.com/brutifuloutsiderart (https://artbarkinternation.wixsite.com/brutifuloutsiderart) for more information.

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Entertainment & THE ARTS

Getting three for one

Delightful selection of choreographer's recent works

ON STAGE

By TED MILLS
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

For those whose happenstance has not let them connect with the work of choreographer Misa Kelly, Sunday night's recital at Center Stage Theater offered an excellent opportunity to catch up with her. That the evening came with introductions of two other choreographers — Los Angeles' Louie Cornejo and Monterey's Kerstin Stuart — witnessing this performance feels like an immense stroke of luck.

After a month and a half, "3 Cities: 3 Choreographers" finished its mini-tour of each choreographer's home base city in Santa Barbara, where Ms. Kelly's SonneBlauma Dansez company has operated since 2003.

The opening number, "Gypsy Dreams," dates from that time, danced on this evening by Erika Kloumann, her red hair matching her flaming red outfit. Set to Czech avant-garde improviser Iva Bittova's compelling vocal and violin work, the piece plays with some recognizable moves that could be labeled "gypsy" — a bit flamenco and some dervish-like spinning — but then it is treated to Ms. Kelly's particular and intense language. Ms. Kloumann struggles, against gravity and outside forces as much as she transcends them, crawling across the floor, engaging in a series of slow-motion backward rolls. Ms. Kloumann, breathless in her physicality, gives it her all.

In the following piece, "Nadar Sabe Mi Llama el Agua Fría," danced by Kaita Lepore to selections from Vivaldi's Four Seasons, we began to, if not understand, recognize Ms. Kelly's style. For here was the struggle again, with Ms. Lepore's character undone by unresponsive or spasmodic limbs, or slowed to a crawl. With the seasonal change in theme supplied by the music, a sense of growth and metamorphosis was unmistakable, but the work remains very human despite its insectoid weirdness.

"Le Jardin Rouge" was a duet for two similarly dressed dancers — Anaya Cullen and Ms. Lepore (returning after intermission) set to Ms. Kelly and her husband Stephen's own sound collage, full of wailing, slamming doors, electronics, a mouth harp, snippets of opera and children singing. The dancers complement each other's moves, or one leads the other around or watches the other solo in a sort of bemused detachment. Striking and surreal in most places, it was as playful as the fun of its cut-up music.

Ms. Stuart, who brought down two other dancers for her three works, operates with some of the same language as Ms. Kelly, but shows a broader net of experimentation. "Love Is a River," a solo for Ms. Stuart, is set to a song by fellow Monterey residents Jen Shayani and Arlene Petalver. Ms. Stuart's tall frame makes her a powerful stage presence and her variations on running, sliding and other legwork already set her apart from Ms. Kelly's style.

But it was in "Zu-Sam" that Ms. Stuart showed her eclecticism. An investigation into falling in love and maintaining a relationship, Ms. Stuart and her collaborator, Sebastian Grubb, spoke and sang to each other, while Ms. Stuart took up the guitar and delivered plaintive love songs that slowly became co-dependent and needy, much to the audience's amusement. A battle began, with chairs used as symbols for personal space, then as weapons, before the piece moved into its last moments of understanding and reconciliation (but was there a hint of a twist at the end, too?) The performance struck that perfect balance between knowingness and confidence, and both Mr. Grubb and Ms. Stuart matched each other in daring spirit and athleticism.

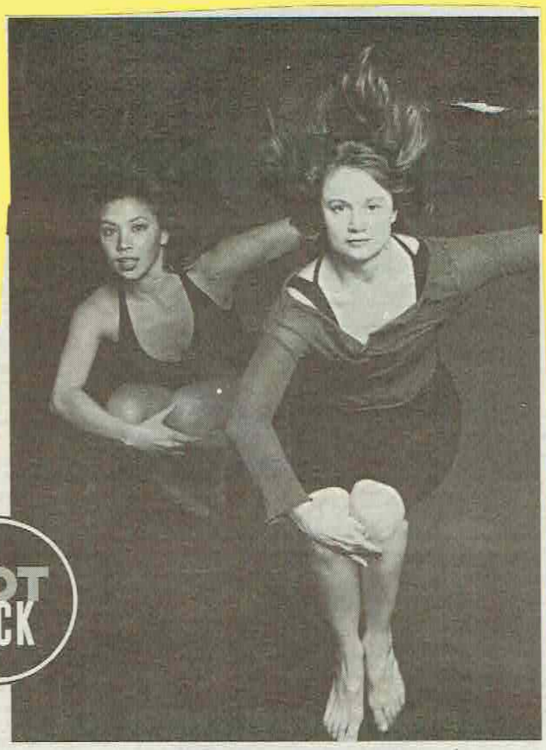
Ms. Stuart's final work, a duet with Ana Flecha, took Massive Attack's already moving "Teardrop" and brought it to another level with "Mitten Drinnen." Dressed in matching, fuzzy sleeveless sweater tops, the two explored what seemed to be the geometric happening of a line meeting a curve, and variations thereon. But as "Teardrop" is a grandiose ballad set against mechanic tick-tocks, the song felt appropriate. It also felt strangely moving, but ineffable like in a dream. It was as if "Mitten Drinnen" was the work the music was written for, only Massive Attack didn't know it.

With all these works from the two choreographers front-loading the program, ending the evening with the sole Louie Cornejo piece, "Weathering," raised expectations. Nine dancers entered from a side curtain, laying down a series of small stones between the stage and the audience. These dancers, in solos or duets, would be leading each other at times, like students and teachers, and at others, they would be workers in a field, using stones to accentuate their own hands' contact with the ground. Mr. Cornejo kept the stage busy, but "Weathering" was difficult to adjust to. As the closing piece, it felt like more should have been delivered.

But that's maybe unfair. Overall, the evening was like a good mixed tape made by a friend who wants to turn you on to the newest in new. Consider that mission accomplished.

e-mail: life@newspress.com

A&E CALENDAR



HOT PICK

3 Cities: 3 Choreographers at Shall We Dance

FRIDAY: This statewide dance tour promises athleticism and emotional zaniness in seven dance pieces by three prominent choreographers. Misa Kelly of SonneBlauma Danscz Theatre has been described as "astonishingly gifted"; after Louie Cornejo danced in an excerpt of Martha Graham's *Acts of Light*, he went on to perform on both coasts; and Monterey's Kerstin Stuart has studied and performed with Karl Schaffer, Cid Pearlman and Joe Goode. **[NC]**

8pm. Shall We Dance Studio, 205 17th St., Pacific Grove. $15. 373-5678 or shallwedancepg.com.

SonneBlauma Danscz Theatre, *3 Cities: 3 Choreographers* - an evening of contemporary dance that embraces athleticism, emotional zaniness, humor and integrity featuring the works-in-progress, repertory and premieres of new works of three choreographers from three different cities: Louie Cornejo (Los Angeles), Kerstin Sturat (Monterey) and Santa Barbara's Misa Kelly of SonneBlauma Danscz. A portion of this show will be presented in Istanbul in a cross-cultural exchange that marks the opening of new geographic collaborations and the cross-pollination of artistic visions; 7:30 p.m., Center Stage Theatre, upstairs in Paseo Nuevo Mall. For tickets and more information call Center Stage Box Office at 963-0408 or order online at www.centerstagetheater.org

Photo by Am Wu

Ericka Kloumann is a featured dancer for SonneBlauma Danscz in *3 Cities: 3 Choreographers*.

All Together Now

3 Cities, 3 Choreographers.
At Center Stage Theater, Sunday, May 25.

Reviewed by **Justine Sutton**

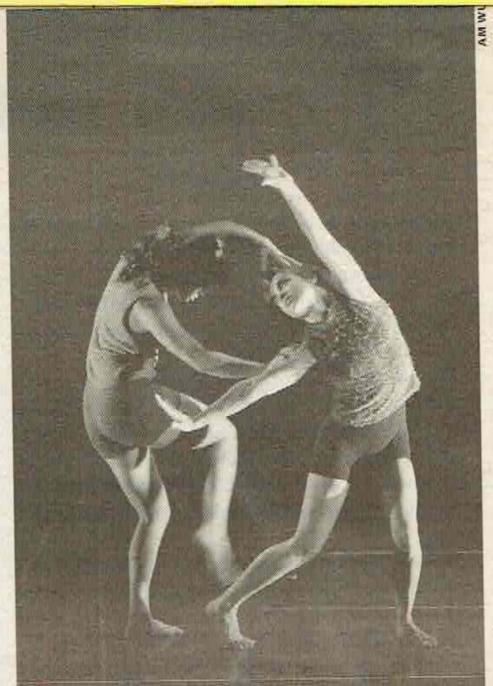
Three choreographers from different parts of California converged Sunday in an innovative show at Center Stage. The brainchild of Misa Kelly, director of SonneBlauma Danscz Theatre, *3 Cities, 3 Choreographers* brought her together with Kerstin Stuart of Monterey and Louie Cornejo of Long Beach for a tour that ended here in Santa Barbara.

The evening opened with three solos — two of Kelly's and one of Stuart's. Kelly's "Gypsy Dreams" was powerful, the music frenetic and intense with screeching Russian vocals. Her style has a strong gymnastic component, and in this piece she put it to use, incorporating martial arts movements with modern fluidity. Dancer Erika Kloumann, in red, was lithe, springy, and incredible to watch.

Kelly also presented "Nadar Sabe Mi Llama el Agua Fria," recently performed at Santa Barbara Dance Theatre's *Unplugged* show at UCSB.

Stuart danced her own solo, "Love Is a River," which blended athleticism with deep emotion. She also performed with Ana Flecha in "Mitten Drinnen," in which unison was especially effective considering the dancers' physical resemblance.

A highlight of the evening was Stuart's duet "Zu-Sam," which she performed with Sebastian Grubb. A masterful blend of dance, theater, live music, and humor, the piece opened with offstage questions about relationships being fired at Grubb as he began to dance, and continued with Stuart joining him onstage with her guitar to sing a song with the refrain, "I want more." The two sparred, reconnected, sang to each other, and engaged in beautiful sequences of tumbling, lifting, and intertwining. A frank portrayal of romantic relationships, the piece ranged from slapstick comedy with a pair of chairs to heartfelt moments of real connection.



Kerstin Stuart (left) and Ana Flecha in Stuart's "Mitten Drinnen."

Cornejo's single offering ended the evening — a rich and dazzling piece for nine women titled "Weathering." At the outset, the dancers reverently placed small stones at the edge of the stage area. Throughout the piece, they picked up and put down the stones, incorporating them into the dance or simply rolling them in their hands. There was a refreshing variety of body sizes and shapes among the dancers, and their movements were simple and clean, seeming to portray falling, dying, and rebirth — the cycle of the seasons, and of life. ■

CASA Magazine

12

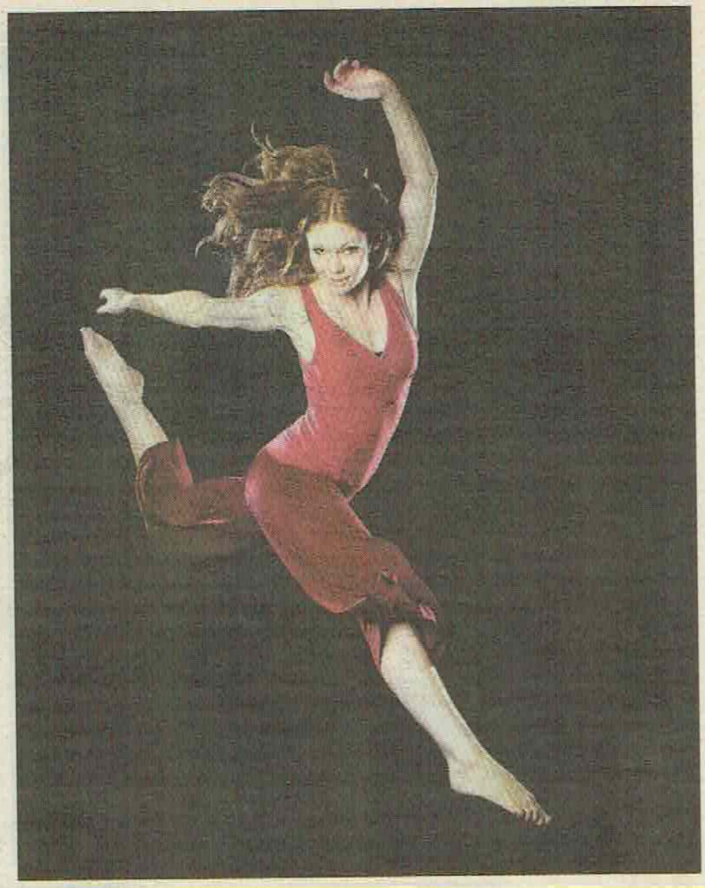
3 Cities: 3 Choreographers, an evening of contemporary dance, takes place at Center S Theatre at 7:30pm on Sunday, May 25th.

May 23, 2008

A leap for mankind

SonneBlauma's latest dance tour meditates on the spiritual

By Joe Hansen
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT



For SonneBlauma Danscz Theatre founder and Artistic Director Misa Kelly, creating and performing dance is a spiritual undertaking.

The artistic connection to the divine and to the rest of humanity has been on prominent display for SonneBlauma's 3 Cities, 3 Choreographers Tour, in which Kelly's work will be shown with pieces by fellow contemporary dance choreographers Louie Cornejo and Kerstin Stuart for shows in Los Angeles, Pacific Grove, Santa Cruz and, finally, Santa Barbara on Sunday.

"We all have different ways of connecting with the divine and connecting with the universe. I have the sense that we're all interconnected; sort of akin to indigenous philosophies where they believe that we're all part of the web of life. And when I dance, there's very much a part of it; it cultivates an awareness of that," she says.

And Kelly's work is not remote or aloof — the audience plays a crucial role.

"For myself, the process isn't complete unless the audience is there," she says. "The performers become so vulnerable and so open that they're able to connect with the audience who, I hope, is also open and vulnerable, to create sort of a third dynamic, and the art becomes complete."

The hope for the tour has been to bring the three communities together, but also to take advantage of the three artists' home turf; Cornejo operates out of Los Angeles, Stuart hails from Santa Cruz and Kelly calls Santa Barbara home. The three artists have quite distinctive styles as well, adding to the depth of the production.

Kelly herself is showing three pieces, which explore the ephemeral connection between body and spirit through the medium of movement.

"Gypsy Dreams" taps the inner fortune teller that lives inside all of us, while "My Flame Knows to Swim the Cold Waters" is an ambitious piece that, in Kelly's words, "displays the greatest strength and the greatest frailty of a being battling and falling, beaten and defiant." The third is "Le Jardin Rouge," which tells the tale of rival personalities who find unity through the shared

Stuart is also bringing three pieces, including the deeply personal "Love is a River."

"This piece was created with my desire to express emotion about loss through my feet and legs, plus the simplicity of only walking and running. I wanted to get to the purity of what I went through losing someone I really loved," she says. "That big heartache that sets you back for a while and makes you wonder how you will ever get back into that river they call love."

"Mitten Drinnen" is a duet inspired by the oil paintings of Linde Martin of Carmel. "Zu-sam," Stuart's most recent work, explores relationships through seven different scenarios.

Cornejo's sole piece for the project is a brand-new work created for the tour called "Weathering," which sees the L.A.-based choreographer experimenting with props in a compelling way. He was first inspired to do the dance when he saw a woman being stoned — as in beaten with rocks — for an act of infidelity. Cornejo incorporated this idea in an abstract way, juxtaposing it against the use of stones in therapeutic methods.

The coming together of these three artists is a microcosm of one of the primary goals of SonneBlauma, which is to form bridges between communities and cultures. In that quest, Kelly has discovered a literal connection between artists and the communities they serve.

"What I like about the community experience is that it seems to reflect sort of the general experience of the human condition, because we're steeped in our bread and butter gig, we're working, we're connected to the community. And then the art is of the community, and it ends up being about the community in a way. So when community members come and see the work they can connect with it because it's some thing that's birthed out of their own environment," she says. "It's sort of a native species." ■

Strength in Numbers

Three California Choreographers Collaborate

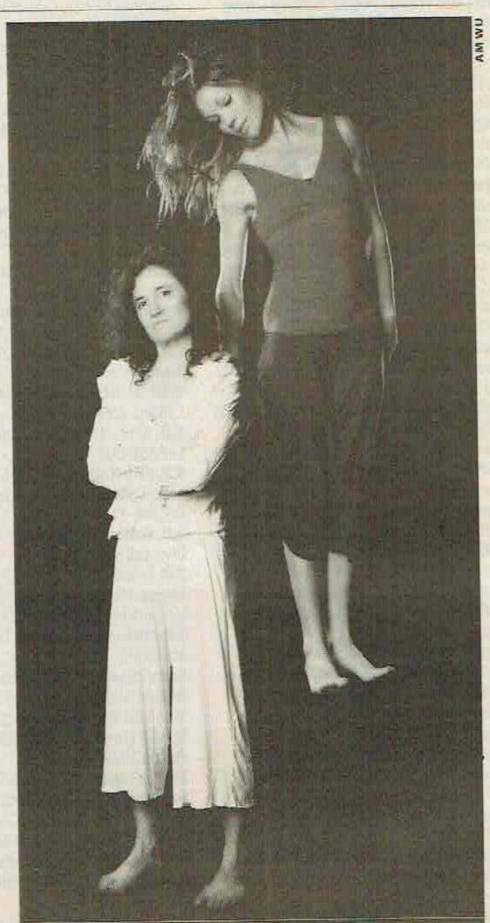
by **Elizabeth Schwyzer**

This Sunday, no fewer than 15 dancers will appear at Center Stage Theater to perform the work of three choreographers. Though most of these performers are rarely seen in Santa Barbara, they're all converging here because of one Santa Barbara artist's vision.

For Goleta-raised, UCSB-educated choreographer and dancer Misa Kelly, producing her own evening-length dance show seemed at first like a daunting project. Kelly is the founder and director of SonneBlauma Danscz Theatre, a part-time, project-based modern dance company. Like many artists, Kelly works a number of jobs to support her art, and has to be creative about her time and energy. When she began to envision a touring performance, she knew she'd have to be resourceful in order to make it work. "I had a vision of choreographers collaborating and going from city to city on tour," she said. "I thought that if we could tour to places where at least one person knew the studios and the theaters and could draw an audience, it could work. I put the idea out there, and it was a little like fishing: You cast, and cast, and eventually, there's a tug."

The first sign of interest came from Kerstin Stuart, a one-time Santa Barbara dance artist now living in Monterey. Kelly and Stuart began corresponding by email, discussing a shared program and sharing their creative processes with one another. Hoping to find a third collaborator, Kelly went to Los Angeles to see a showcase of new dances by emerging choreographers, where she was most struck by the work of Louie Cornejo. "I approached him after the show and asked him if he'd like to work with me in putting together a touring show," Kelly said. "He said yes."

With a trio of artists, a show was born, and *3 Cities, 3 Choreographers* began to take shape. Because Kelly, Stuart, and Cornejo live in separate regions of the state, they worked individually to create segments of a single show. Not until their debut in Los Angeles were they able to see the entire production as a whole. "I had to trust them entirely based on what I'd seen in the past," Kelly explained. "It was surprising and shocking how well our work went together."



AM WU

Choreographer Misa Kelly (left) with soloist Erika Kloumann.

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Kerstin Stuart (left) and Ana Flecha in Stuart's "Mitten Drinnen."

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12

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May 23, 2008

Kelly's own work deals with similar themes. "My work is very much Jungian-based," she explained. "I go beneath the place of metaphor and dream. It's not intellectual; I want the audience to go somewhere new, to experience something fresh and exciting and profound." She, too, will present three pieces, including a solo titled, "My Flame Knows How to Swim in Cold Waters." Kelly says the piece represents a journey of survival of someone who has been broken. "It explores the power and glory of the human spirit," she said, "and its ability to transcend and to survive."

Unlike Stuart and Kelly, Cornejo is presenting just one piece: a work for nine female dancers called "Weathering." Yet he, too, is looking at the human condition and the ways we deal with loss and suffering. Cornejo took as his subject the practice of stoning women for social transgressions such as marital infidelity. "I wanted to work with rocks as props," he explained. "There's also a lot of throwing yourself onto the floor, and onto other dancers. Even the movements are broken, and kind of weathered. Rocks can be used as a weapon, but in eastern culture they are also used in more peaceful practices like meditation and massage — so I liked that contrast."

So far, the show has had a good reception, and not only in California; thanks to the magic of YouTube, Kelly has been invited to bring her work to a modern dance festival in Istanbul in September. In the meantime, her focus is on bringing the show home to her own community. "I'm really proud of what we have done," Kelly said. "I always like charging the environment with inspiration — I think this show does that."

From an auspicious premiere at the Diavolo Dance Space in downtown L.A., where Cornejo had connections, *3 Cities* went on to perform in Pacific Grove and Santa Cruz, where Stuart lived and worked. This weekend's show in Kelly's hometown of Santa Barbara will be their finale, but the process of collaboration has inspired each choreographer to reach out to other artists in the future. "Over the last few years I have spent a lot of time in the studio alone," Stuart said, "but now I want to put myself out there more and cross paths with others. I think art is really about collaboration and community. It feels right to do it this way." As part of the show Stuart is presenting three works, among them a duet inspired by a series of abstract paintings by a German woman who lived through both world wars, and a personal solo about the pain of love and loss. "When I first fell in love with modern dance, it was because I saw a balance between something beautiful and disturbing," Stuart said. "I loved how there was this ability to explore the whole range of what we experience and witness as humans."

4•1•1 Catch ***3 Cities, 3 Choreographers*** at Center Stage Theater on Sunday, May 25, at 7:30 p.m. For tickets or more information, call 963-0408, or visit *centerstagetheater.org* or *3cities3choreographers.com*.

Performing in "Gypsy Dreams," above, is Erika Kloumann. At left, dancers Kaita Lepore, left, and Gwenna Devries dance in a piece called "Le Jardin Rouge."

AMY WU PHOTOS, COURTESY OF SONNEBLAUMA

ONSTAGE

3 CITIES, 3 CHOREOGRAPHERS
When: 7:30 p.m. Sunday
Where: Center Stage Theatre, 751 Paseo Nuevo (upstairs)
Cost: $15
Information: 963-0408, www.centerstagetheater.org

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Up Close with Misa Kelly

Santa Barbara Choreographer on a Mission

By **Elizabeth Schwyzer**
Tue Aug 10, 2010 | 1:00pm

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In a bright Guatemalan blouse and skirt, curly black hair escaping in long tendrils from beneath her straw hat, and an impish smile dancing at the corners of her eyes, Misa Kelly is hard to miss—and she wouldn't have it any other way. The 51-year-old choreographer is a champion of visibility: for herself as an artist, for the art form of dance, and for other artists who struggle to be seen. Along with her husband, Stephen, Kelly is co-artistic director of SonneBlauma Danscz Theatre, a contemporary dance theater company based in Santa Barbara. Since 1996, she's been making dances that address the full range of human experience, from dark and desperate to light and playful.

Misa Kelly

Paul Wellman

Kelly earned her BA at UCSB, double-majoring in economics and dance, and 16 years later she maintains both her creative spirit and her focus on finances. “Some of us fumble around for a long time thinking society will support us as artists,” she reflected over coffee last week. “When I finally figured out that wouldn’t happen, it cleared things up.”

The solution Kelly has conjured up is to work full-time as a receptionist at a law firm while pursuing an equally committed career as a dance artist in the hours in between. Running a dance company means everything from holding auditions, teaching classes, and enlisting folks to manage a Web site, book tours, and write grant applications. Not many could handle the intensity of Kelly’s schedule, but she seems to thrive on it. In the past few years, she’s taken her company to Istanbul, New York, Monterey, Los Angeles, and Santa Cruz. She’s created dances for the annual New Works showcase hosted by the Santa Barbara Dance Alliance, launched a resource Web site for dance artists internationally, and is now in the planning stages for ADaPT: A Dance and Physical Theater Festival to take place in Santa Barbara in summer 2011. On top of all that, she still performs in many of her own works and also finds time for her visual art.

Yet it hasn’t all come easily; Kelly had to teach herself the ropes. And now that her artistic career is flourishing, she’s eager to share her knowledge with others. At the Dance SOS Center, she shares everything from the success stories of major choreographers to how to find rental space and tap into funding. She hopes the ADaPT Festival will build community between Santa Barbara artists from across the genres. “Community is really important to me,” she said. “Relationship is everything; that’s why art exists—to draw us together.” To learn more, check out sonneblauma.com, dancesoscenter.com, and sbadaptfest.com.

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Affinity III, at Various Locations

Mini Dance Festival Brought Artists Together from Across U.S.

By **Elizabeth Schwyzer**
Mon Oct 22, 2012 | 2:00pm

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Affinity III

Choreographers working in America these days might be forgiven for developing tunnel vision as a survival strategy. It's easy to fall prey to the scarcity model — not enough funding, rehearsal space, performance venues, or public support — and to react by scaling back goals and guarding resources jealously. Yet instead of narrowing her scope, longtime Santa Barbara dance maker Misa Kelly has expanded — some might even say exploded — her vision.

Last week's Affinity III marked the fifth festival Kelly has hosted since launching SB-ADaPT Fest (A Dance and Physical Theater Festival) in October 2011, bringing artists from Slovenia, Israel, Turkey, and the U.S. together to meet and perform in Santa Barbara. The purpose of the smaller Affinity series is to keep those connections alive and to foster new ones.

This most recent mini-fest kicked off Wednesday with a master class led by New York choreographer Valerie Green. Dancers of all ages and backgrounds packed the studio, eager to sample Green's blend of Hawkins technique with her own distinctive idiom. Later, the Fishbon Pescadrome hosted an evening of conversation, film screenings, and experimental Skype performances — a technology Kelly and her Husband, Stephen, have used extensively in their long-distance artistic collaborations. There was talk of ADaPT 2013 in Istanbul and footage from the preceding festivals in Santa Barbara, Paris, and Vienna.

Come Saturday, a crowd gathered at Yoga Soup for an evening of dance, film, and music presented by NECTAR. Barefoot in a hot-pink tulle dress festooned with plastic dinnerware and fake mustaches, Misa Kelly welcomed those assembled and declared her intention to support "professional, working-class artists — the 99 percent of us who don't make it to the top." Among this diverse group was SoCal-based classical Indian dancer Ramya Harishankar, who held the audience in her thrall as she conjured flowers with her fingers and an evil snake with her forearm. Kristin Licata and Julia Sabangan of New York's Dance Entropy performed Valerie Green's "Con-Joined," a comic duet centered on push/pull dynamics. NECTAR founder Cybil Gilbertson and her partner Paul Wehrman offered a meditation on love and loss, featuring Wehrman's beatboxing skills. Other Santa Barbara artists and companies included filmmaker Ted Mills, singer/songwriter Valarie Mulberry, and dancer Melissa Block. From elsewhere on the West Coast came BodySensate, Rubans Rouge Dance Company, Perceptions Dance, Hart Pulse Dance Company, and Movement Theatre Colab; Trina Mannino brought solo work from New York.

Affinity III saw artists coming together across all kinds of divides: geographic, economic, stylistic — and simply psychological. What even Kelly may not yet see is that by drawing artists together in this way, she's helping to explode the myth that isolation abets survival.

(https://stanceondance.com/)

An Evolving Dance World

December 12, 2016

An Interview with Misa Kelly

Misa Kelly is based in Southern California and has been making dances for over 20 years. She is a founder and core collaborator of Art Bark (http://www.artbark.org/), a cross-continental dance collective. This interview is part of a series on contemporary dance and its extended implications. (https://stanceondance.com/category/contemporary-dance/)

(https://stanceondance.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Misa-Kelly3.jpg)

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How would you define contemporary dance to someone without a background in dance?

Contemporary dance is kindred to sports in that it uses the body as a vehicle while others witness and experience physiological reactions. Whereas sports have rules and guidelines, in contemporary dance the rules and guidelines are different from dance-maker to dance-maker.

While a contemporary dance-maker may be competitive—and there is a competitive dance scene—in the arts it is generally not the intention to compete to win. While practitioners in both sports and dance can be viewed as elite athletes, contemporary dance draws upon aspects of the human condition not considered in sports. The contemporary dance-maker, additionally, is an innovator of forms, and may integrate sensibilities from other disciplines into their choreographic process.

A contemporary dance may be performed in a traditional theater, but may also make use of site specific venues such as parks, streets, subways, galleries, grocery stores, laundromats, and so on. Performances may also occur in informal settings such as a dance studio or in someone's home.

A contemporary dance-maker may earn nothing, and even go so far as to pay out of their own resources to create and produce a dance. Why do we do it? Passion, purpose, life work, calling.

How would you suggest a student train for a contemporary dance career?

Training is evolving as the field of contemporary dance evolves. As one who began to dance at the late age of 28 in the 80s, my training included six years in a dance program at a university, and two years of study for an MFA. I brought to this my experience with pantomime, gymnastics, equestrianship, and adventuring on skateboards and boogie boards. I had over 150 different teachers in various movement modalities, and also attended workshops by leading figures in the field.

A traditional route would be to grow up learning how to dance in studios, major in dance, and go on to pursue a career. Some dancers may skip a degree and launch directly into a career, which is more usual in ballet than contemporary dance. The types of dancers who contemporary dance-makers use in choreography are not limited to dancers with extensive training. More and more, dance-makers work with people from all walks of life.

If one wants to make their life work being a dancer, then focusing on some movement modality is essential. Develop strong improvisational skills. Be curious, open, good-natured, easy to work with, and reliable. Retain the integrity of your body while receiving technique. Understand that the bones of ballet will serve as a springboard into anything as long as you honor the architecture of your body. Lastly, knowing arts admin skills is a plus.

It is my observation that the concept of "career" could be better framed. I would call it more of an extreme lifestyle. A life as a contemporary dance artist requires not only pursuit of one's primary passion, but development of a tandem career which may or may not be related to dance. It is rare when a dance-maker makes their livelihood solely from dance-making.

(https://stanceondance.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Misa-Kelly-1.jpg)

Are there successful funding models for contemporary dance?

I prefer to think along the lines of resource acquisition as opposed to funding. If you are a contemporary dance-maker locked into receiving money to make your dances and get them out into the world, well, that could quickly prove to be exasperating.

I embrace the success of a dance-maker by their ability to entertain a vision and follow through with concrete action to bring it into a physical manifestation, be it sharing new work in a studio, producing a large festival, or touring internationally. Given this definition, I see myself and my fellow dance-makers successfully manifesting our visions every day.

I know of one dance-maker who had a daily guerrilla practice for a year in open spaces, which cost him nothing more than

his time. On the other hand, I know one person who charged dancers to be in her company; they paid for classes in which they learned choreography, and in exchange they performed in locally produced showcases. I know of another dance-maker who funded her first season all out of her own pocket, and this year launched a crowd funding campaign. Another model is a local dance company affiliated with the university who has access to a plethora of resources.

Our own collective exists in a small city where there is not a single organization that funds the type of work we do. The patrons give to conservative forms such as the ballet, opera or university. Additionally, the least costly alternative for rehearsal space in my town is $17 an hour, with scant availability. The one venue that does provide subsidized space is $20 an hour. Despite the challenges, our collective has manifested amazing things. Granted, we aren't hugely visible in the world of dance, but we are happy little clams in our orbit. Do I get paid for my efforts? Not usually, but sometimes. Does that matter to me? Not anymore. I value creative freedom, and I find I can maximize this by doing something entirely different for my bread and butter income. Would I say no to being paid every time I undertook a project? Of course not! I live in the shadow of a shoestring budget and dip into my dwindling savings to make ends meet.

How do you think your work contributes to the contemporary dance arena?

I have always been an oddball in the field of dance in my small community in Southern California. My process involves breathing in between different mediums of creative expression; some things are better expressed in written word, song, drawing, painting, photography, installation, video, sculpture or ceramics. By sourcing other disciplines, my work itself is impacted. Integrative is a word that comes to mind, which reflects my own psychological journey.

Seven years ago, I witnessed Lloyd Newsom's DV8 in Santa Barbara, and am still coalescing from the experience. I realized technique had stripped me of something essential, and so I set out to de-dancify my body. I recently had insight into a possible modality that could be brought into an academic setting to train dance artists in a way that is relevant to where we are in time/space. It isn't a "technique" in the sense that it isn't created to serve my choreographic voice, and it isn't training for a specific movement vocabulary. It is intended to serve the planet, culture, society and community. It is an integrative awareness practice. Whether this goes beyond me simply carving it out, archiving it and articulating it, I don't know. I am just doing my part by showing up and allowing the information to synthesize and flow through me.

Another way I might be contributing to contemporary dance has to do with my relationship with the societal container in which my dance-making occurs. I've shed for the most part what I call the hierarchical "all about me" model with a single choreographer directing. For a period of time, I used the term "artistic director," but I've always created in the context of community. My first show was co-produced with a group of choreographers.

Art Bark's approach, developed out of a desire to create together in spite of living in different geographic regions, contributes to the field of contemporary dance in that it brings a global perspective. It harnesses the positive power of the internet to bring us closer together.

(https://stanceondance.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Misa-Kelly-2.jpg)

What does the future of contemporary dance look like?

Modern technology is impacting how we interact, and collaborations are easily becoming global in nature. The artists I collaborate with work independently in different cities, consult via chat, email, Skype, send recorded notes via Dropbox or upload videos to YouTube, confer on progress, refine our respective research, and then meet for an intensive session, usually one week, to flesh out the expression and either perform in an event we produce or co-produce, or participate in a showcase hosted by another dance-maker.

The nature of funding for dance is always shifting. The competitive, patriarchal and hierarchical models are antiquated. Although it may seem counter intuitive, the notion of being all-inclusive and sharing resources actually generates more opportunity than less.

With regard to the form itself, I see it possibly impacted by how our brains are changing with the use of technology and social media. When I set a dance on some SBCC students, I became acutely aware that this generation was brought up with access to technology. It seemed as if some vital component of being human was on the cusp of being lost. I felt like I had to roar in order to awaken what I sensed inside them. As our connection with nature lessens, our work changes.

I would rather not go into further detail about what I see as the future, but give my energy to being part of the now. I am currently processing a man headed to the White House who seems like a really poor match. I once thought that focusing on being an artist was the most important way I could contribute to society. I no longer hold that view. My new goal is to meet with like-hearted individuals in the studio and have move/write/sound/draw sessions that creates a safe container for processing. My thought is to harness the power of the body to source ideas and, from these ideas, to come up with bite-sized action plans.

(https://stanceondance.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Misa-Kelly-4.jpg)

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For more information, visit www.artbark.org (http://www.artbark.org/).

First three photos by Tone Stojko; last photo by Sue Bell

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Plesno gledališka predstava v Cankarjevem domu

TV SLOVENIJA 1, 18. 6. 2015, ODMEVI, 22.44

NINA JERMAN (voditeljica): Nadaljujemo pa na odrskih deskah, Nisem nobena dama, sem posrečeno tisto, je zapisala borka zoper stereotipizirane družbene vloge Alma Karlin. Tako imenovana Kolumbova hči, poliglotka, pisateljica. Plesno gledališka predstava v cankarjevem domu v središče postavlja delo te svetovne popotnice.
TINA ŠROT (novinarka): Celjanka Alma Karlin je pred stoletjem kot prva ženska obšla svet. Namesto doma in družine je izbrala umetnost in raziskovanje sveta ter družbe.
MISA MANDIGO KELLY (koreografija, režija, kostumografija): Bila je tako pogumna, da se ni menila za želje družine, družbe, kulturne zahteve. Sledila je svojemu srcu, svojim sanjam in intuiciji. Te njene značilnosti sem opazila tudi pri sebi. Med svojimi dogodivščinami, raziskovanjem in razvijanjem materiala za predstavo sem iskala svoje korenine, svoje prednike in tako prišla do svoje babice in deda, ki sta se izselila iz Jugoslavije.
ŠROT: Ameriška umetnica Misa Mandigo Kelly je predstavo soustvarila s soprogom , glasbenikom Stevenom Kellyjem in tremi plesalkami. Dramaturg Maran Pušavec se ni osredotočil na uprizarjanje življenja slovite pisateljice in popotnice temveč na njena ključna eksistencialna stanja.

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Najmanj štiri Alme na odru

Danes v CD znova gibalno-scenski dialog s svetovno popotnico: Alma.Sama.

Mojca Kumerdej
pon, 22.06.2015, 10:00

Ključne besede: Alma Karlin, Mojca Majcen, Misa Kelly

Alma. Sama. Foto: Tone Stojko

Po dvajsetih letih se je prejšnji četrtek v dvorani Duše Počkaj v Cankarjevem domu s plesno predstavo Alma.Sama vrnila na oder pisateljica in popotnica Alma Karlin. V času življenja je doživela slavo v mednarodnem prostoru, slovenski prostor pa jo je tudi zato, ker je pisala v nemščini, prepoznal šele desetletja po smrti.

Najprej so jo »odkrili« etnologi konec šestdesetih let 20. stoletja, leta 1995 je bila v Cankarjevem domu na prvem festivalu Mesto žensk uprizorjena monodrama Samotno potovanje v dramatizaciji Uršule Cetinski in izvedbi Polone Frelih, leta 2009 pa je režiserka Marta Frelih posnela dokumentarec Alma M. Karlin: Samotno potovanje z Veroniko Drolc v naslovni vlogi. Tokratna plesna predstava Alma.Sama. je nastala v sodelovanju ameriških in slovenskih ustvarjalcev, njena koreografinja Misa Mandigo Kelly pa je med potovanjem skozi Almino zgodbo odkrivala tudi zgodbo svojih prednikov, ki so se pred stoletjem preselili iz Štajerske v Kalifornijo.

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»Kaj je pred stoletjem preostalo drugega izobraženi ženski z meščanskim pedigrejem, ki se ni hotela poročiti in je hotela sama odločati o svojem premoženju, svojem telesu, svoji usodi, kakor da ostane sama, samska, največkrat samotarka«, v gledališkem listu zapiše dramaturg predstave Marijan Pušavec, ki že dolgo raziskuje njeno življenje in delo. Če bi Alma danes potovala okoli sveta, bi imela s seboj prenosni računalnik in digitalni fotoaparat in bi iz cyberkafejev po svetu pošiljala reportaže časopisom v Evropo in domov v Celje. Ta opazka kiparja Franca Purga je Pušavca spodbudila, da je Almi Karlin, katere hiša v Celju še vedno ni preurejena v muzej, postavil virtualno domovanje na spletu.

Erika in desetjezični slovar

Leta 1889 v Celju rojena Alma Karlin je bila bolehen, prav nič obetajoč otrok. Kot edinka majorja avstrijske vojske in učiteljice na nemški dekliški šoli je bila deležna nemške vzgoje, večinoma je imela stik z nemško govorečo skupnostjo in je v nemščini tudi pisala. Izjemno nadarjenost za jezike je razvijala že doma, nato pa je v Londonu leta 1914 na Royal Society of Arts z odliko opravila izpite iz osmih jezikov in že med študijem raziskovala svetovne kulture, zgodovino in geografijo. Odlično opremljena z interdisciplinarnim znanjem se je konec leta 1919 s stalnim spremljevalcem, pisalnim strojem erika, in desetjezičnim slovarjem, ki ga je sestavila sama, odpravila iz Celja na osemletno potovanje okoli sveta.

Pot jo je vodila prek Genove v Južno in Srednjo Ameriko, nato prek Havajev na Japonsko, v Korejo in na Kitajsko, od tam je zavila proti Avstraliji in nekaj let preživela na pacifiških otokih, potovanje pa je leta 1927 končala v Indiji, od koder se je po prejetju sporočila o materini bolezni vrnila v Celje. Na poti je neprestano pisala, občasno delala kot prevajalka ter pošiljala domov etnološke predmete, ki jih hrani Pokrajinski muzej Celje. Po vrnitvi se je lotila urejanja zapiskov s poti, prirejala predavanja ter objavljala potopise v angleških in nemških ženskih revijah, v zgodovinsko-etnoloških pa tudi okultnih publikacijah.

Alma, ki je na poti raziskovala tudi duhovna izročila in obredja, je bila namreč teozofinja. Na enem svojih predavanj po evropskih mestih je spoznala »sestro dvojčico«, slikarko Theo Schreiber Gammelin, ki se je preselila k njej v Celje, kjer sta živeli skupaj do Almine smrti leta 1950. Med vojno se je Alma pridružila partizanom in bila internirana v Dachau, od koder se ji je uspelo rešiti s pomočjo Theinih zvez. Mednarodno slavo je Alma Karlin doživela v času življenja, njeno delo je cenila tudi njena znanka, švedska nobelovka Selma Lagerlöf, medtem ko je prvi slovenski prevod njenega potopisa Samotno potovanje izšel šele leta 1969.

Preskočila je ustvarjalna iskra

Ko se je Mojca Majcen, slovenska plesalka iz Celja, leta 2011 udeležila Adapt festivala (A Dance and Physical Theatre Festival) v Kaliforniji, ki sta ga organizirala koreografinja Misa Mandigo Kelly in njen mož, glasbenik Stephen Kelly, je med njimi preskočila ustvarjalna iskra. Ustanovili so umetniški kolektiv ArtBarc, katerega članici sta med drugimi plesalki Trina Mannino iz Brooklyna in Cecily Stewart iz Santa Barbare, kjer Kellyjeva tudi živita.

Misa, Američanka havajsko-slovenskega porekla, je med brskanjem po družinski preteklosti odkrila, da njeni predniki po materini strani izhajajo iz Logarske doline in Gorenja blizu Velenja. Ko sta leta 2012 s Stephenom prvič obiskala Slovenijo, jima je Mojca predstavila bibliotekarja, pisatelja in dramaturga

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Marijana Pušavca, ta pa njima Almo Karlin in jima predlagal, da bi pripravili plesno predstavo o njej. Čezoceansko sodelovanje je potekalo dve leti in pol. Na osnovi Alminih besedil sta Misa in Stephen s sodelavci v štirih ameriških mestih razvila enoinpolurni plesnogledališki material, ki ga je Marijan Pušavec v sklepnem, tritedenskem procesu v Celju dramaturško obdelal.

Kolektiva ni zanimalo uprizarjanje Almine življenjske zgodbe, ampak univerzalni izraz in sporočilo njene osebnosti in dela. »Alma Karlin je bila vizionarka in zelo pogumna ženska, ki v svojem času ni bila ne dobro razumljena ne sprejeta. Odločila se je za lastno pot ne glede na ozko okolje, v katerem je živela. Zdi se mi pomembno prepoznati sodobne vizionarje in jim pozorno prisluhniti, saj prinašajo vizije in ideje, kako se spopasti s sodobnimi problemi in konflikti,« pravi Misa Kelly. S trmo, podobno Almini, se je odločila za svojo pot tudi Misa. Ko je po končanem študiju poslovne ekonomike prejela doktorsko štipendijo na Stanfordu, je to zavrnila in se vpisala na plesni oddelek na kalifornijski univerzi UCLA, kasneje je magistrirala na Kalifornijskem inštitutu za umetnost ter študirala tudi vizualno umetnost in glasbo.

Med pripravo projekta je Misa odkrila mnoge podobnosti z Almo, vključno z zanimanjem za duhovnost. »Sem umetniška šamanka,« pravi, »skozi umetnost se pogosto lotevam tabuiziranih vsebin in elementov, ki pa jih poskušam oblikovati tako, da se ljudje počutijo varne, se z njimi povežejo in se jim prepustijo.«

Gibalna raznolikost

V Santa Barbari s Stephenom ustvarjata v finančno skromnih razmerah. Nekaj malega za njune projekte prispeva lokalna skupnost, nekaj vsako leto donirajo njuni meceni, predvsem pa za vsak projekt sama zbereta denar. Za predstavo Alma.Sama. jim je prvič uspelo pridobiti denar tudi od ameriške nacionalne organizacije American Dance Abroad, ki je nastopajočim plačala tudi letalske vozovnice.

V predstavi poleg Mojce Majcen, Trine Mannino in Cecily Stewart nastopa Misa, medtem ko Stephen zaradi nedavne operacije hrbtenice glasbe ne izvaja v živo, ampak je ta posneta. Štiri nastopajoče skozi asociativne, fluidno nanizane prizore uprizarjajo različna Almina stanja – od živahne radovednosti, potopljenosti v pisanje do samosti in tesnobe. Različna geografska okolja in čustvena stanja podkrepljujejo kostumske spremembe in scenski elementi, kot so pisalni stroj, vsakdanji predmeti iz različnih okolij in šamanski pripomočki.

Na odru lahko gledamo eno samo Almo, razpršeno skozi štiri ženska telesa, ali pa štiri Alme različnih starostnih in življenjskih obdobij. Almino osebnostno kompleksnost uprizarja tudi gibalna raznolikost, ki vključuje prvine baleta in sodobnega plesa, medtem ko je koreografinja Misa Kelly skušala iz svojega telesa izluščiti čim bolj naraven, vsakdanji gib, ki je pomenil tudi izhodišče njenega holističnega koreografskega in režijskega pristopa.

Z eno plesno predstavo ni mogoče povedati zgodbe Alme Karin, katere življenjepis se bere kot filmski scenarij, pravi Marijan Pušavec. Plesna predstava Alma.Sama. je tako dialog z izjemno žensko, ki se je močneje kot s spolom in nacionalnostjo identificirala z ustvarjalnostjo.

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1 / 2

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Plesna predstava Alma.Sama. *Danes v CD znova gibalno-scenski dialog s svetovno popotnico*

Po dvajsetih letih se je prejšnji četrtek v dvorani Duše Počkaj v Cankarjevem domu s plesno predstavo *Alma.Sama* vrnila na oder pisateljica in popotnica Alma Karlin. V času življenja je doživela slavo v mednarodnem prostoru, slovenski prostor pa jo je tudi zato, ker je pisala v nemščini, prepoznal šele desetletja po smrti.

MOJCA KUMERDEJ

Najprej so jo »odkrili« etnologi konec šestdesetih let 20. stoletja, leta 1995 je bila v Cankarjevem domu na prvem festivalu *Mesto žensk* uprizorjena monodrama *Samotno potovanje* v dramatizaciji Uršule Cetinski in izvedbi Polone Frelih, leta 2009 pa je režiserka Marta Frelih posnela dokumentarec *Alma M. Karlin: Samotno potovanje* z Veroniko Drolc v naslovni vlogi. Tokratna plesna predstava *Alma. Sama.* je nastala v sodelovanju ameriških in slovenskih ustvarjalcev, njena koreografinja **Misa Mandigo Kelly** pa je med potovanjem skozi Almino zgodbo odkrivala tudi zgodbo svojih prednikov, ki so se pred stoletjem preselili iz Štajerske v Kalifornijo.

»Kaj je pred stoletjem preostalo drugega izobraženi ženski z meščanskim pedigrejem, ki se ni hotela poročiti in je hotela sama odločati o svojem premoženju, svojem telesu, svoji usodi, kakor da ostane sama, samska, največkrat samotarka«, v gledališkem listu zapiše dramaturg predstave **Marijan Pušavec**, ki že dolgo raziskuje njeno življenje in delo. Če bi Alma danes potovala okoli sveta, bi imela s seboj prenosni računalnik in digitalni fotoaparat in bi iz cyberkafejev po svetu pošiljala reportaže časopisom v Evropo in domov v Celje. Ta opazka kiparja Franca Purga je Pušavca spodbudila, da je Almi Karlin, katere hiša v Celju še vedno ni preurejena v muzej, postavil virtualno domovanje na spletu.

Erika in desetjezični slovar

Leta 1889 v Celju rojena Alma Karlin je bila bolehen, prav nič obetajoč otrok. Kot edinka majorja avstrijske vojske in učiteljice na nemški dekliški šoli je bila deležna nemške vzgoje, večinoma je imela stik z nemško govorečo skupnostjo in je v nemščini tudi pisala. Izjemno nadarjenost za jezike je razvijala že doma, nato pa je v Londonu leta 1914 na Royal Society of Arts z odliko opravila izpite iz osmih jezikov in že med študijem raziskovala svetovne kulture, zgodovino in geografijo. Odlično opremljena z interdisciplinarnim znanjem se je konec leta 1919 s stalnim spremljevalcem, pisalnim strojem erika, in desetjezičnim slovarjem, ki ga je sestavila sama, odpravila iz Celja na osemletno potovanje okoli sveta.

Pot jo je vodila prek Genove v Južno in Srednjo Ameriko, nato prek Havajev na Japonsko, v Korejo in na Kitajsko, od tam je zavila proti Avstraliji in nekaj let preživela na pacifiških otokih, potovanje pa je leta 1927 končala v Indiji, od koder se je po prejetju sporočila o materini bolezni vrnila v Celje. Na poti je neprestano pisala, občasno delala kot prevajalka ter pošiljala domov etnološke predmete, ki jih hrani Pokrajinski muzej Celje. Po vrnitvi se je lotila urejanja zapiskov s poti, prirejala predavanja ter objavljala potopise v angleških in nemških ženskih revijah, v zgodovinsko-etnoloških pa tudi okultnih publikacijah.

Alma, ki je na poti raziskovala tudi duhovna izročila in obredja, je bila namreč teozofinja. Na enem svojih predavanj po evropskih mestih je spoznala »sestro dvojčico«, slikarko Theo Schreiber Gammelin, ki se je preselila k njej v Celje, kjer sta živeli skupaj do Almine smrti leta 1950. Med vojno se je Alma pridružila partizanom in bila internirana v Dachau, od koder se ji je uspelo rešiti s pomočjo Theinih zvez. Mednarodno slavo je Alma Karlin doživela v času življenja, njeno delo je cenila tudi njena znanka, švedska nobelovka Selma Lagerlöf, medtem ko je prvi slovenski prevod njenega potopisa *Samotno potovanje* izšel šele leta 1969.

Preskočila je ustvarjalna iskra

Ko se je Mojca Majcen, slovenska plesalka iz Celja, leta 2011 udeležila *Adapt festivala* (*A Dance and Physical Theatre Festival*) v Kaliforniji, ki sta ga organizirala koreografinja Misa Mandigo Kelly in njen mož, glasbenik Stephen Kelly, je med njimi preskočila ustvarjalna iskra. Ustanovili so umetniški kolektiv ArtBarc, katerega članici sta med drugimi plesalki Trina Mannino iz Brooklyna in Cecily Stewart iz Santa Barbare, kjer Kellyjeva tudi živita.

Misa, Američanka havajsko-slovenskega porekla, je med brskanjem po družinski preteklosti odkrila, da njeni predniki po materini strani izhajajo iz Logarske doline in Gorenja blizu Velenja. Ko sta leta 2012 s Stephenom prvič obiskala Slovenijo, jima je Mojca predstavila bibliotekarja, pisatelja in dramaturga Marijana Pušavca, ta pa njima Almo Karlin in jima predlagal, da bi pripravili plesno predstavo o njej. Čezoceansko sodelovanje je potekalo dve leti in pol. Na osnovi Alminih besedil sta Misa in Stephen s sodelavci v štirih ameriških mestih razvila enoinpolurni plesnogledališki material, ki ga je Marijan Pušavec v sklepnem, tritedenskem procesu v Celju dramaturško obdelal.

Kolektiva ni zanimalo uprizarjanje Almine življenjske zgodbe, ampak univerzalni izraz in sporočilo njene osebnosti in dela. »Alma Karlin je bila vizionarka in zelo pogumna ženska, ki v svojem času ni bila ne dobro razumljena ne sprejeta. Odločila se je za lastno pot ne glede na ozko okolje, v katerem je živela. Zdi se mi pomembno prepoznati sodobne vizionarje in jim pozorno prisluhniti, saj prinašajo vizije in ideje, kako se spopasti s sodobnimi problemi in konflikti,« pravi Misa Kelly. S trmo, podobno Almini, se je odločila za svojo pot tudi Misa. Ko je po končanem študiju poslovne ekonomike prejela doktorsko štipendijo na Stanfordu, je to zavrnila in se vpisala na plesni oddelek na kalifornijski univerzi

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UCLA, kasneje je magistrirala na Kalifornijskem inštitutu za umetnost ter študirala tudi vizualno umetnost in glasbo.

Med pripravo projekta je Misa odkrila mnoge podobnosti z Almo, vključno z zanimanjem za duhovnost. »Sem umetniška šamanka,« pravi, »skozi umetnost se pogosto lotevam tabuiziranih vsebin in elementov, ki pa jih poskušam oblikovati tako, da se ljudje počutijo varne, se z njimi povežejo in se jim prepustijo.«

Gibalna raznolikost

V Santa Barbari s Stephenom ustvarjata v finančno skromnih razmerah. Nekaj malega za njune projekte prispeva lokalna skupnost, nekaj vsako leto donirajo njuni meceni, predvsem pa za vsak projekt sama zbereta denar. Za predstavo *Alma.Sama.* jim je prvič uspelo pridobiti denar tudi od ameriške nacionalne organizacije American Dance Abroad, ki je nastopajočim plačala tudi letalske vozovnice.

V predstavi poleg Mojce Majcen, Trine Mannino in Cecily Stewart nastopa Misa, medtem ko Stephen zaradi nedavne operacije hrbtenice glasbe ne izvaja v živo, ampak je ta posneta. Štiri nastopajoče skozi asociativne, fluidno nanizane prizore uprizarjajo različna Almina stanja – od živahne radovednosti, potopljenosti v pisanje do samosti in tesnobe. Različna geografska okolja in čustvena stanja podkrepljujejo kostumske spremembe in scenski elementi, kot so pisalni stroj, vsakdanji predmeti iz različnih okolij in šamanski pripomočki.

Na odru lahko gledamo eno samo Almo, razpršeno skozi štiri ženska telesa, ali pa štiri Alme različnih starostnih in življenjskih obdobij. Almino osebnostno kompleksnost uprizarja tudi gibalna raznolikost, ki vključuje prvine baleta in sodobnega plesa, medtem ko je koreografinja Misa Kelly skušala iz svojega telesa izluščiti čim bolj naraven, vsakdanji gib, ki je pomenil tudi izhodišče njenega holističnega koreografskega in režijskega pristopa.

Z eno plesno predstavo ni mogoče povedati zgodbe Alme Karin, katere življenjepis se bere kot filmski scenarij, pravi Marijan Pušavec. Plesna predstava *Alma.Sama.* je tako dialog z izjemno žensko, ki se je močneje kot s spolom in nacionalnostjo identificirala z ustvarjalnostjo.

»Skozi umetnost se pogosto lotevam tabuiziranih vsebin, a jih poskušam oblikovati tako, da se ljudje počutijo varne.«
MISA MANDIGO KELLY

Prizor iz predstave *Alma.Sama.* FOTO TONE STOIKO

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Page: 87
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1 / 1

oder Alma. Sama.

ArtBark International iz Santa Barbare je v sodelovanju s Cankarjevim Domom in Hišo Kulture Celje prejšnji teden v Cankarjevem domu premierno uprizoril plesno-gledališko predstavo *Alma. Sama.*, ki prinaša drobce iz življenja celjske pisateljice, pesnice in popotnice Alme M. Karlin (1889–1950). Lirična ekspresija je osnovni takt predstave, ki ne želi uprizarjati življenja Karlinove, temveč njena ključna eksistencialna stanja. Karlinova je v slovenski zavesti zapisana kot pisateljica, ki je sicer pisala in objavljala izključno v nemščini, v splošni zavesti pa kot svetovna popotnica. Zaznamovalo jo je potovanje okoli sveta med letoma 1919 in 1927. Med potjo se je preživljala z znanjem tujih jezikov in s pisanjem potopisnih reportaž.

Ustvarjalce predstave – Miso Mandigo Kelly, Stephena Kellyja in Marijana Pušavca – so prevzele predvsem Almine osebnostne lastnosti, kot so samodisciplina, vztrajnost, upornost in usmerjenost k cilju, ter življenjska usoda, ki je namesto družinskega življenja izbrala umetnost in raziskovanje sveta in družbe. Do Karlinove je ustvarjalce privedel splet naključji. Zakonca Kelly sta se povezala s celjsko plesalko Mojco Majcen, ob obisku Slovenije pa ju je seznanila s Pušavcem, ki že več let raziskuje življenje Karlinove. Mandigo Kellyjeva je nato odkrila, da ima tudi sama slovenske prednike ter da so njeni sorodniki ravno v času, ko se je Karlinova odpravila po svetu, iz Slovenije emigrirali v ZDA. Tako je zanjo ustvarjanje predstave pomenilo tudi raziskovanje lastnih korenin.

Karlinova je z modernimi nazori pred stoletjem z lastnim zgledom prispevala k osvobajanju ženske. Samo sebe je imenovala bitje ženskega spola, in čeprav je na vrhuncu literarne slave zaživela v dvoje s sestro po duši, je v najglobljem človeškem bistvu do konca ostala sama. Mandigo Kellyjeva Karlinove ne vidi kot žensko svojega časa: *»Bila je velika vizionarka, zrla je daleč v prihodnost. To je čas, v katerem spol nima nobene vloge.«* E. M. M.

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